

**Testimony Supporting S.B. 846:
An Act Concerning the Transfer of Educational Credits**
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Select Committee on Children
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Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

We testify on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a statewide, independent, citizen-based organization dedicated to speaking up for children and youth in the policymaking process that has such a great impact on their lives.

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports S.B. 846, which would require school districts to notify Unified School District #2 (the Department of Children and Families' school district) in a timely manner of any transfer student arriving from USD #2, and would require that USD #2 forward the student's records shortly upon receiving this notification from the new school district. Importantly, the proposed bill would also require school districts to accept credits earned by a student while he/she was enrolled in USD #2.

This law would help ensure that the treatment of children transferring from USD #2 is generally consistent with the treatment of children transferring from all other school districts, including USD #1 (the Department of Corrections' school district). **We believe that the proposed bill should be amended to completely align the treatment of transfer students from USD #2 with the treatment of transfer students from all school districts. This alignment could be ensured by amending the proposed bill to require that USD #1 and USD #2 receive notification that a former student is enrolled in a new district not later than two days after the student registers.** Currently, S.B. 846 proposes that all other previously attended school districts receive notification within two days of a student's registration in a new district, but allows ten days before USD #1 or USD #2 must be notified that a former student has registered in a new district.

Connecticut Voices for Children firmly believes that the academic achievements of youth in USD #2 should be recognized and their already difficult reintegration back into school districts and communities be made as easy as possible after their time in USD #2 has been completed. It is estimated that two-thirds of high school aged youth do not return to school upon release from juvenile detention; one of the main obstacles to their successful return is the lack of timely, complete information sharing between facilities.¹ When these children do not reenter school, they lose one of their prime opportunities to learn academic and social skills that would help them become successful members of society.²

Helping children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, including those in USD #2, reconnect with their education is crucial to their long-term success,³ while multiple obstacles to

reenrollment “almost guarantee” student failure.⁴ Slow transfer of documentation and inability to transfer credits – both addressed in the proposed bill – have been documented nationally as two obstacles to enrollment for children returning from both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.⁵ Formalized communication between corrections staff and community social organizations has been found to be effective in helping to facilitate the transition for students returning to school.⁶

It is imperative that students be accepted quickly back into the school environment and allowed to transfer credits earned while in detention. In general, students held back are statistically more like to drop out of school,⁷ and these at-risk students facing already difficult transitions need no additional reasons to leave school. A student’s successful transition back into the educational system, which is crucial to positive outcomes as an adult,⁸ should be made as easy as possible.

Accordingly, we strongly support S.B. 846, which would make the educational transfer processes for children from USD #2 more consistent with the transfer processes for children from other school districts. We encourage that the proposed bill be amended so that the required timelines for all districts, including USD #1 and USD #2, be exactly the same, with a school district required to inform a student’s previously attended school district no later than two days after the student registers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

¹ Leslie Brock and Natalie Keegan, “Students Highly At Risk of Dropping Out: Returning to School After Incarceration,” *The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk* (January 2007), available at <http://www.neglected-delinquent.org/nd/resources/spotlight/spotlight200701b.asp> (citing data from the New York City Department of Education that “indicate that more than two-thirds of high school-age offenders do not on return to school upon release” and suggesting that a lack of timely and complete information and documentation is a main problem to the successful transition of youth back into schools).

² Ibid. (stating that young offenders can best be served in school, where they can gain academic and social skills that will enable them to become productive community members).

³ Ronald D. Stephens and June Lane Arnette, “From the Courthouse to the Schoolhouse: Making Successful Transitions,” *US Department of Justice* (February 2000), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/178900.pdf> at pg. 3 (stating that helping children from the juvenile justice system “successfully reconnect with the education mainstream is an essential first step” in helping troubled youth become responsible citizens). See also Sarah Ingersoll and Donni LeBoeuf, “Reaching Out to Youth Out of the Education Mainstream,” *US Department of Justice* (February 1997), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/163928.pdf> at pg. 1 (noting that “children who are not educated will more than likely lack adequate skills to secure employment and become self-sufficient adults....when they are employed, high school dropouts are often on the low end of the pay scale without employee benefits or job security”).

⁴ David R. Giles, "School Related Problems Confronting New Jersey Youth Returning to Local Communities and Schools From Juvenile Detention Facilities and Juvenile Justice Commission Programs," *The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute's Re-Entry Roundtable* (June 2003), available at http://www.njisj.org/document/giles_report.pdf at pg. 3 (stating that minor problems in the process of returning juvenile justice involved youth lead to serious setbacks for these youth, while multiple problems "can almost guarantee failure").

⁵ Ibid. at pg. 5 (noting that many New Jersey school districts do not accept credits earned by youth while attending school in the juvenile justice system) and 7 (stating that failure to transfer records in a timely manner is a problem for students trying to reenter school in New Jersey). See also Sue Burrell, "Getting Out from the Red Zone: Youth from the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems Speak Out About the Obstacles to Completing their Education, and What Could Help," *Youth Law Center* (October 2003) available at <http://ylc.org/pdfs/GettingOutOftheRedZone.pdf> at pgs. 4-5 (citing interviews with children and parents involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare system suggesting that slow reenrollment processes and the inability to transfer credits were obstacles for students attempting to return to school). See also Brock and Keegan (suggesting that a lack of timely and complete information and documentation is a main problem to the successful transition of youth back into schools).

⁶ Stephens and Arnette at pg. 6 (stating that "most effective strategies for helping juvenile offenders make the transition into the school and community include some formalized system of communication among the corrections staff and community social institutions—schools, mental health agencies, alcohol and drug treatment centers, and employment training and placement agencies, among others").

⁷ Jonas Cox and Richard Sagor, "At-Risk Students: Reaching and Teaching Them," 2nd Ed. (Larchmont, New York: Eye on Education, 2004) at 267 (stating that statistically, "children held back have a far greater chance of dropping out of school").

⁸ Daniel P. Mears and Jeremy Travis, "The Dimensions, Pathways, and Consequences of Youth Reentry," *Urban Institute Justice Policy Center* (January 2004), available at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410927_youth_reentry.pdf at pg. 10 (stating that education is "a central conduit to gainful employment and the transition to adulthood").

